Opinion

Guest editorial

Renew "volunteerism"

By Jerry Birmelin
Lake Ariel

Some time ago, President Reagan made an appeal to Americans to look to each other to help solve many of our social needs by volunteerism. I suppose he had in mind the sort of programs that are in existence today, such as the American Cancer Society, Goodwill Industries, etc. By and large, these organizations are doing a fine job, with limited funds. A large part of their success is due, no doubt, to the sacrificial efforts of their volunteers.

While the President had these sort of groups in mind, I would like to suggest a new type of volunteerism. It is not really new, just forgotten. I'm referring to the attitude of America's people whereby they are willing to help themselves first, and look for outside help as a last resort.

When campaigning for State Representative last year, I visited over 5,000 homes from Carbondale to Dickson City. A frequent comment I heard was, "Don't let them take away my benefits," or "What are you going to do for me?" These statements came mostly from the older generation. Those people who worked most of their lives for everything they have. Those people who never knew what "benefits" were. People were glad to get a paycheck every week, let alone, extras.

This same generation today would have our younger generation saddled not only with supporting their own families, but paying for the "benefits" of their elders.

I think it's time our older folks began to realize that if they were not wise enough to provide for their wants at retirement age, they should not force our younger people to compensate for their mistake. Perhaps, instead of selfishly demanding more programs supported by the government, these senior citizens ought to volunteer for community service organizations and help others. One of the greatest joys of life is found in service to others. "It is more blessed to give than to receive." No one has more time to do this than our retired parents and their grandparents.

Volunteerism is the spirit that settled, built and prospered America. It is the spirit that lifts the soul, gives an added meaning to life, and lifts us out of the despair of selfishness. It is the spirit that will make life in America better for all of us. It begins when we "volunteer" to help ourselves first instead of seeking the support of others. It ends with a life directed towards meeting the needs of those unable to do so for themselves.